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ABSTRACT

This paper represents work in progress that considers the role of research in international development programs undertaken to establish and develop schools of librarianship and information science, and some of the possible reasons why many have failed to develop once the external support was terminated. It notes that the development of a research profile rarely featured in previous activities and contrasts this with other disciplines in which the research capacity has made university departments critical to social and economic progress. It notes the real and imaginary obstacles to research and to international cooperation and outlines the benefits to individuals and institutions of engaging in this type of international collaborative research. Finally, it urges a combined effort to take advantage of the current global interest in information transfer to persuade the funding agencies to support the schools' efforts to develop and apply research expertise that substantiates the role of information and information services in economic and social development. (Contains 36 references.) (Author/MES)

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Research and international technical cooperation programmes

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Abstract:

This paper represents work in progress that considers the role of research in international development programmes undertaken to establish and develop Schools of Librarianship and Information Science, and some of possible reasons why many have failed to develop once the external support was terminated. It notes that the development of a research profile rarely featured in previous activities, and contrasts this with other disciplines in which the research capacity has made university departments critical to social and economic progress. It notes the real and imaginary obstacles to research and to international cooperation, and outlines the benefits to individuals and institutions of engaging in this type of international collaborative research. Finally, it urges a combined effort to take advantage of the current global interest in information transfer to persuade the funding agencies to support the Schools' efforts to develop and apply research expertise that substantiates the role of information and information services in economic and social development.

Introduction

During the second half of the last Century, there was a very considerable programme of international technical cooperation projects:

> *"to promote, establish, develop, maintain and evaluate ... librarianship and the library profession generally."* (Parker)

Over the years, a significant contribution was made to the development of Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences internationally by many Schools in Europe and North America. Typically this involved them in releasing staff to undertake reviews and advisory visits or short periods of teaching in order to establish or develop schools of librarianship. These activities were usually complemented by gifts of publications and equipment paid for by the sponsoring agency. Exchange visits by staff to discuss

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curricula and observe teaching methods also formed part of a typical development project, and sometimes scholarships were awarded to staff or prospective staff of the developing institution to enable them to take a higher qualification in the partner institution.

In recent years, there appears to have been a decline in international support for the development of education in librarianship and information sciences, notwithstanding short-lived programmes of support for the Schools in the former Soviet Union and its east European satellite states during the 1990's. Recent reductions in support have been based as much on a lack of political support for work in this area as on the reductions in the budgets of the development agencies, perhaps because of a perception that earlier efforts did not produce significant benefits in terms of economic and social development.

We are now entering an era of rapid technological change and proliferating information resources in which information literacy is increasingly widely recognised as important. Changes in information products and services have given rise to fundamental changes in the way information is used and its impact on every aspect of economic, educational and social activity. Effective use of information is recognised as a key success factor within an innovation-driven society.

Developing countries seeking the economic and social advances that are held in prospect by these changes are facing challenges not only in implementing the necessary improvements in their technical and regulatory infrastructures, but also in creating a society and workforce with the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make use of applications of ICTs and benefit from them. As a result, there appears to be the beginnings of a shift in the interests of the development agencies, which may benefit library and information science education and research.

Limitations on successful development

It is clear that in some countries the professional Schools remain weak and underdeveloped, with limited human and material resources, possibly teaching an out of date and irrelevant curriculum, failing to provide sufficient appropriately trained manpower to meet national needs, and held in low esteem. There is, moreover, some evidence that the funding agencies have become concerned that previous phases of international support for the expansion of universities were marred by under investment and poor standards.[1] How then should we make best use of the resources that might become available for professional development?

One conclusion that might be drawn from a simple analysis of the condition of library education in many institutions in developing countries would suggest that what is required is simply further assistance to enhance the physical resources and to guide the revision of the curriculum. There is no denying that this kind of assistance may be necessary. If, however, it is accepted that in some cases earlier efforts to assist those Schools to make progress have failed to prevent atrophy setting in subsequently, there must therefore be a search for a deeper understanding of the issues that stimulate continuous and ongoing development.

To draw attention to factors likely to underpin the development of library and information science schools and their curricula, the international agencies have published guidelines based on the opinions of people experienced in managing or developing schools.[2] There have also been reviews of the management of Schools of Librarianship in the developed[3] and developing[4] countries, and some analysis of the causes of recent closures of Schools in the U.S.A.[5], but there appear to have been no critical evaluation of what features of external collaboration have a successful impact on LIS education in the developing countries nor of the LIS Schools' broader impact on development. The author's current aim is to evaluate previous efforts to assist Schools in developing countries to become self-sustaining, and to consider different approaches to future international collaboration.

Could it be that part of the problem may be attributable to the failure of the donor agencies to provide appropriate support? How accurate were its perceptions of the needs and capabilities of the beneficiary institution? How well informed was the donor agency about the interests and capabilities of the individuals or institutions selected to provide assistance? A recent report on academic links has pointed out that, in some cases, the purpose of the external support and the means of achieving success may not have been

clearly defined and understood in advance, and the human and material resource inputs may not have matched the real requirement. In other cases, it suggested that, because of a change in priorities or simply pressure on limited resources, external support had not been sustained for a sufficient period of time for it to be fully effective.[6]

Could part of the problem be attributable to the fact that, in effect, a consultancy service has been provided, and there are inherent limitations in the nature of consultancy activity and the *modus operandi* of consultants themselves? For example, a consultant is recruited to carry out a specific task, and disseminates the results according to the requirements of the contract, or personal inclination and the availability of time. Consultants' reports may add to factual knowledge and point to outstanding problems, but are sometimes not readily available, even to others working with a similar remit in the same institution.

Could it be that, when the reports are available, they are not sufficiently evaluative and self-critical? Whilst there are some merits in simply reporting facts that might not be widely known or whose dissemination has been in a language not widely understood, it is far more important that evidence of the problems that the consultant has faced and had to overcome to be successful are widely appreciated. These provide useful lessons for those who follow, or who are undertaking similar tasks elsewhere. However, few published reports give such insights into these critical issues, perhaps because these are also undoubtedly sensitive issues, but perhaps equally because of the failure of the funding agency to specify this as a requirement.

Or could it be that that the failure to develop many library and information sciences schools to their full potential must largely be attributed to a more fundamental limitation in the nature of consultancy? All too often it appears that the consultants have worked within the limitations of their experience, but have failed to develop the new skills or knowledge that the beneficiary institution and its staff really need. For example, there is equal concern about the relevance of the Anglo-American model of education for librarianship[7] in Africa and Latin America because they did not take into account differing cultural, social, and economic conditions[8], and in the last ten years there have been reports that curricular revisions have been put in train by Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences in the region specifically to eliminate excessive Anglo-American influence.[9] The response of the development agencies has been to make greater use of South-to-South cooperation, but consultants from the developing countries appear to have worked within established paradigms.

The need for new approaches

There may be other significant factors to emerge from an analysis of experts' guidelines and comparisons with the actual patterns of development. However, most of the factors likely to be revealed are those that appeared relevant in the circumstances that applied in the latter half of the last Century. While the efforts to develop Schools that were successful during that period must be applauded, other approaches that do not appear to have been considered or attempted must also be identified and their likely utility must be evaluated. In particular, consideration must be given to what is most likely to be relevant and successful in the circumstances that will be encountered in the early years of the new Millennium. It must be acknowledged that in the last twenty-five years, something has clearly inhibited developments in our field. Whatever it is, it must be understood and incorporated it in future international technical cooperation programmes.

Changes in the circumstances of the development funding agencies and in the technological environment have led to suggestions that previous means of supporting staff and curriculum development might be supplanted by the introduction of ICTs. More than 10 years ago a feasibility study for UNESCO led to what was intended to be a 4-year pilot project utilising an electronic network to connect information science programmes in developing countries to support educational innovation through increased cooperation among developing countries.[10] However, UNESCO's SLISNET project* appears to have stalled, partly because of linguistic and cultural barriers[11], and partly because UNESCO lacked the funds and political will to sustain it, but perhaps also because most of the prospective participants had never met each other and therefore lacked confidence in using the system. Whilst there is some evidence to suggest that email can

* The SLISNET website was viewed at URL - http://www.enssib.fr/autres-sites/SLISNET/index.html

improve communications between institutions that have established links, we need a better understanding of the potential and limitations of these new media as an instrument in development.

A considerable effort has also been made through the 1990s to assist information services in the developing countries to make, and to be seen to be making, an effective contribution in national development. This is clearly important, but some questions should perhaps be asked about the approach to promoting an appreciation of the value and impact of information that has been taken to date. The British Council, for example, supported the HEIDI project (Higher Education Investment in the Development of Information), in which the author played a small part in its formulation. This was aimed at assessing the current thinking and determining strategic policy on investment in higher education libraries and information services worldwide[12], and appears to have been successful in influencing the policies of international agencies. The Information Sciences Division of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) carried out a series of inconclusive case studies, attempting to develop methodologies for assessing the impact of information.[13] Most of these investigations were focused on the impact of improving library collections or services, or teaching professionals in other disciplines how to use information[14].

Whilst these efforts have served their purpose or at least kept attention on developing information services in education, government and industry, access to the increasingly abundant information will not in itself create a more informed society. Information literacy goes beyond the ability to identify and retrieve information from appropriate sources, and the ability to use ICTs, important though those skills are. More attention needs to be given to the complementary ability to use information effectively, and, particularly in the developing countries, to create sources of local information and to promote their use and an appreciation of their value

The HEIDI and IDRC projects appear to have overlooked one fairly obvious feature of developing countries. In most developed countries the academic departments of universities are one pool of expertise to which governments and the business community can turn to carry out investigations and provide informed advice. The universities not only deliver a nation's educational aspirations but also, by generating and disseminating knowledge, advance thinking and create understanding. The research that they undertake provides evidence about existing provision, reveals gaps, highlights issues, and stimulates new ideas that may become the basis of new policies and services. In developing countries, the universities represent the only pool of expertise readily available locally.[15] They are the national think tank. Neither governments nor businesses in such countries have the large payroll of highly qualified employees found in the industrialised countries. There is ample evidence of the involvement of other disciplines in providing research services and policy advice to governments in developing countries[16], but examples of Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences undertaking such a role are relatively rare (or at least little publicised).

One of the features noticeably absent from most accounts of the development projects that have been carried out in Schools of Librarianship in the past is evidence of any research undertaken or even any discussion of the part that wide-ranging research undertaken by them might play in national development. It is, of course, fair comment that, in the first stages of a School's development, the capacity for undertaking research may not exist. There was also inevitable peer pressure to focus their initial research on local problems inhibiting library development.[17] Research into problems in professional practices and into future manpower needs was also actively encouraged by both the international professional associations and the intergovernmental agencies.

No one would deny that investigations of these problems are necessary, but it appears to be the case that, in many of the Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences in the developing countries, there is limited research on other topics. Since 1996, for example, the National University of Mexico's Centre for Research in Librarianship (UNAM-CUIB), with partner Universities in 8 other Latin American countries, has been developing a database on research in Schools of Library and Information Sciences in the region. † Although this is admittedly limited in its coverage, it now includes a substantial list of projects, but most are focused on library education and practice and few on other issues fundamental to national development.

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† The ICBIDIAC website was viewed at URL – http://cuib.unam.mx/icbidiac/index.html

Various obstacles have been suggested as responsible for the lack of library and information science research. In Africa, the reasons put forward for the limited research activity have included: lack of finance; lack of time to carry out research; and a lack of primary periodicals in which to publish research results.[18] It must be acknowledged that these obstacles are real.

In many of the developing countries, the institutional budget does not make much provision for supporting research. A recent report on the situation in Tanzania indicated that the government allocates only 1% of university budgets to support research, and almost any research must therefore be undertaken with external funds.[19] Moreover, there still appear to be academics in developing countries who see the opportunities for library and information science research as principally focusing inwards on library education and library practice.[20]

The limited budgets of libraries mean that access to periodicals and conference proceedings in developing countries is poor.[21] However, the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) [‡] has recently been approached by partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the New Independent States to assist in supporting the production, access and dissemination of electronic information. As well as providing training in publishing skills, INASP has negotiated highly favourable, differentially priced subscriptions with major publishers and information providers for libraries in developing countries.

It is not only the domination of professional publishing by commercial companies in the industrialised countries and the use of the English language that act as barriers to bringing external knowledge to the developing countries. In the whole of Latin America, there are no more than about 60 indigenous journals in the field of LIS[22]; in the Arabic-speaking world there is probably no more than one such journal published in each country[23]; and few of them are widely available outside the country of origin.

Poor coverage of non-English language journals in the major indexing/abstracting services exacerbates this limited access to relevant bibliographic resources and to sharing information between the developing regions, although coverage of Latin American journals benefits from the efforts of the National University of Mexico's Centre for Library and Information Research.[24]

As a result, library educators are not free from the attitudes engendered by the depressingly poor levels of support for their university libraries, and in many cases have joined the:

> "*flight from harsh realities into the detachment of academic study*" [25]

researching and writing articles that flood the professional literature but contribute little to resolving problems.

Developing collaborative research

For potential researchers outside the Anglophone countries, there are additional problems. Even if the quality of their research and its results is sufficient to refute the charge made against their American colleagues that:

> "*Library educators seldom produce well-researched, literary products...This is where the library schools most fail the profession.*" [26]

Some researchers' limited or non-existent familiarity with English inhibits the dissemination of the research results in the major international scholarly journals in the field.

Even opportunities for publishing the results of research within their own countries are inhibited. Problems in the production, marketing and distribution of professional journals initiated in developing countries, particularly in Africa, make their existence fragile[27], although various international efforts are being made to overcome them. The African Journals Support and Development Centre[§] was set up in Kenya 1997 to undertake collective marketing and distribution of scholarly journals, as well as research and training

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[‡] The INASP website was viewed at URL – http://www.inasp.org.uk/

[§] The AJSDC website was viewed at URL – http://www.oneworld.org/aas/

activities, and African Journals Online** was established as a pilot project in 1998 by INASP with the initial aim of providing access to 50 journals.[28] Another example is SciELO - Scientific Electronic Library Online - an electronic virtual library covering a selected collection of Brazilian scientific journals.††

To overcome the problem of limited research activity, it has been suggested that appropriate professional organisations must take steps to enhance governmental awareness of library needs, but this seems to be a forlorn hope. The experience of at least some universities in developing countries is that, paradoxically, even academics who had studied abroad and were familiar with the potential of modern library services appear to have done little to encourage library development after their return home, possibly because the information available through the libraries in their countries was not so relevant in the region. So, it appears that the responsibility for taking the initiative must rest with the research community.

In the past, the initiative for collaboration has often been taken by LIS Schools in the developing countries or international agencies' officers, and the needs of the Schools have then often been seen as the short term updating of the curriculum and associated development of their human and material resources that was described earlier in this paper. Whilst this support may well be necessary, how can they also be persuaded to accept that engaging in collaborative research offers them some greater hope of becoming self-sustaining?

Given a focus on the issues concerning the development funding agencies, there appear to be opportunities for the Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences in all the developing countries to enhance their status by researching the role of information and information services in support of relevant aspects of development. It is therefore encouraging that, despite the alleged obstacles to research and the limited opportunities for publicising the results, it is possible to find examples of progress made in some developing countries towards establishing a base of expertise in research into, for example, rural development [29], medical librarianship[30], education, communications, science and technology, [31] and agriculture.[32] How, then, can more research needs be identified that are likely to attract the attention of the government of the country concerned and the support of an external funding agency, and that meet the interests and are within the competence of the potential partners in a cooperative project?

Collaborating to support and expand the research base presents a number of different challenges for the Schools in the industrialised countries. Their national development agencies are more accustomed to supporting the development of libraries and information services. How then can relationships be developed with, and different perspectives be fostered amongst the agencies that fund international development to persuade them support the Schools in the developing countries as centres for research? Equally challenging is how to develop appropriate partnerships with Schools in the developing countries. How might efforts be made to retain and build on the links that are established with overseas students who attend Schools in the developing countries? Do the Schools in the industrialised countries do enough to encourage overseas students to focus their research interests on topics that are relevant to their countries' development needs, and develop appropriate research skills? Do the Schools in the developed countries do enough to instil in their overseas students the habit of publishing the results of their research, and assist them to develop the writing skills required to address the different audiences for research results – scholars, practitioners, and policy makers – and to prepare papers to a standard acceptable to appropriate journals?

There are other challenges that the Schools in the developed countries must face. How can they ensure the professional commitment of their staff? Staff will find an additional outlet for their existing research interests, the possibility of new sources of support, and perhaps some new methodological challenges and fresh insights. How can they ensure the support of their institution? Recently financial pressures on higher education in many of the industrialised countries, and the contractual constraints that the institutions are imposing on academics' time, have been creating an attitude within some Universities that may be inimical to any activity that appears to subsidise international development. However, the approach discussed here should mean that the employing institution would benefit from the facilitation of the legitimate research interests of its academic staff, and from the associated staff development.[33] In short, if they concentrate on their own areas of expertise, these issues should not be a problem for the Schools in the developed countries.

** The AJOL website was viewed at URL – http://.inasp.org.uk/ajol

†† The SCiELO website was viewed at URL – http://www.scielo.br/

Mutual benefits

For those who are committed to research, whether in the developed or the developing countries, international collaboration in research offers a number of other benefits. It introduces them to new opportunities for research, and develops a wider range of professional contacts with similar research interests. It may require them to adopt new, inter-disciplinary approaches and develop the range of their competences. It also attracts additional funding that will not only attract kudos, but may provide some improvement in the resource base, particularly for the Schools in the developing countries.

There are also particular benefits for the Schools in the developing countries in international collaboration. Their staff may have access to the richer resources of the Schools in the developed countries. Research will not only develop their capacity to produce accurate and timely data, to undertake analysis, and to feed back into policymaking.[34] It raises their awareness of the potential demand for information services, of the availability of financial resources for them, and of political attitudes towards the role and development of library and information services. It also cannot fail to contribute to a School's clearer understanding of professional manpower requirements in the country, of revisions required in their curricular content, and of staff development needs in both the School itself and the nation's library and information services.

More effective dissemination of research and development findings, to policy makers, to managers, to staff delivery services, to NGOs and to the educational institutions is a major priority. This is in addition to publishing papers in refereed journals read by the few.[35] The publication of the research results in either institution's country not only raises awareness of the issues, but also raises the profile and national and international standing of both the collaborating institutions and the individual researchers.[36] It may also be seen as having a direct impact not only on improving library and information services, but also on the political influence of the LIS profession on society, ensuring that it is not left on the periphery of affairs.

The way forward?

There is a need for a new paradigm for international technical cooperation projects, in which inputs are directed more towards developing the research potential than they have been to date.

TECHNICAL COOPERATION INPUTS	RESEARCH POTENTIAL
• establishing partnership	⇒ reviewing political, managerial, and financial attitudes and circumstances; evaluating pedagogical and research capacity
• identifying needs and planning activities	⇒ market research: undertaking background studies; evaluating scope, objectives, funding, etc. for development related projects; drafting proposals for projects and requests for funding
• exchanging staff	⇒ evaluating relevant staff competences, development needs and required activities
• providing equipment, books, journals and other materials	⇒ creating comparable indigenous resources and studies of their use and sustainability
• undertaking joint programmes	⇒ undertaking research projects
• reporting activities	⇒ publishing and promoting research results; enhancing profile of partner institutions and funding agency

First we must recognise that while the activities of these agencies have declined, their influence has not diminished to the same extent. For example, the energy that the British Council mobilised in securing the interest of the World Bank in the role of library and information services was impressive. Its support for the

HEIDI project and its associated lobbying activities were a significant influence in the establishment of the World Bank's infoDev[‡‡] programme.

The policies of UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector should be and can be driven by the wishes of the member states. The policies of other development agencies are driven by the opinions put forward persuasively to politicians and senior government administrators, in both the developed and developing countries. The task of the LIS research community is to ensure that the potential contribution to economic and social development of research into information needs and use, and its role in moving forward the agendas of the development agencies, is fully appreciated and receives greater support.

In practical terms, this seems to offer a further role for IFLA in identifying the research expertise in areas relevant to development problems that exists in the Schools in both the developed and developing countries, and that might be brought together to address those problems. Another role might be in organising conferences and workshops on a regional or international level, to alert the development funding agencies and national governments to the potential role of the Schools of Librarianship and Information Sciences, to outline the research capacity that exists in them, and to develop their capabilities.

It is equally important that IFLA's member associations and institutions contribute to promoting these aims through their national UNESCO Commissions and appropriate government Ministries, and that IFLA engages fully in the global debate about the role of research into information in support development issues. National and regional groups of LIS educators also have a role to play in influencing national library associations, UNESCO National Commissions, and government agencies. But we also have to take initiatives as institutions or individuals to demonstrate what can be done to support relevant research, and to ensure that its impact on development is fully valued.

This paper is a revised version of 'International development of librarianship and information science education and the role of research', a contribution to a festschrift for Dr. Peter Vodosek, Rektor of Hochschule fur Bibliotheks- und Informationswesen (HBI), Stuttgart, published to mark the occasion of the merger of HBI with Hochschule fur Druck und Medien to create the new Hochschule fur Medien in 2001.

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